**The Archbishop of Wales’ Presidential Address to the Governing Body**

**April 19 2023**

The 14th Chapter of St John’s Gospel opens with these words of Jesus:

“Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.”

Easy words to hear, much harder to live by, particularly as we look at the world around us with pressing, seemingly overwhelming problems.

In my address this morning, I wish to cover some key areas which present significant opportunity and challenge for the Church In Wales. Some are internal to the Church In Wales, others relate to our commitment to mission and evangelism and others to the wider geopolitical and environmental challenges we face.

Let’s begin with the big picture: in March 2023 the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) produced its latest synthesized summary report document AR6. The document contains the headlines from the longer reports which are available online. Drawing on the latest research and the work of successive COP meetings, the document makes for a sobering read and here I quote:

“Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above {between} 1850–1900 {and} 2011–2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals.”

The report continues: “Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. This has led to widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people. Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected.”

Assessing the gap between mitigations, reductions and the increase of greener technologies, the report says that projections suggest this (based on nationally determined contributions) “make it likely that warming will exceed 1.5 degrees during the 21st century and make it harder to limit warming to 2 degrees.”

The reality is that we face what is now understood to be no longer a climate challenge, but an emergency and that every part of human activity will need reform if we are to reduce emissions and limit global warming. So much hangs on this.

It is easy to imagine that we can do little in the face of the scale of the emergency and that decisions too are made elsewhere over which we have little control. This is not true.

Let me outline three areas in which the Church In Wales can become prophetically active:

* Personal choices
* Our ministry in Ministry Areas, Diocese and Province
* Our advocacy at UK and Welsh Government level to argue for change.

In relation to personal choices, there are clear commitments we can make before God: assessing our own carbon footfall and taking remedial action to reduce or offset it; an ongoing commitment to re-cycling - re-use, reduce and recycle. Although these changes can seem small, their main effect is on the way markets work. We are able to shape the priorities of multinational groups in goods and services by making personal choices. Traditionally we’ve called this stewardship. But it is now perhaps invested with a new energy and prophetic edge.

In relation to our MAs we ought to ensure that all of our churches sign up to the A Rocha Eco Church Awards and that we shape our activities and policies as far as possible to move us from registration to one of the awards and finally to Gold star. Many churches already commit to making graveyards places where biodiversity can flourish. When we consider the UK has lost 60% of its flying insect life in the last 20 years this seems a small but important step.

At a provincial level we have recently launched the Net Zero initiative and the Climate Hub. Today we are launching the Energy Footprint Tool which we have developed to monitor our progress. Under the leadership of Dr Julia Edwards and Alex Glanville these developments will give focus to our efforts to play our own part in reducing emissions. This is a major initiative and I want to thank both Alex and Julia for their work. We look forward to Julia spending time with the Senior Teams in each diocese to focus plans on how net zero can be achieved in each one.

In the last year I have been working closely too with different agencies and charities who also excel in this area and I have provided a list of some of them in your meeting packs. I want to announce that in 2024 the Church In Wales will host an Environmental Summit, which will bring some of the key stakeholders together in conversation about ways in which Wales can be an exemplar of good practice. We have formed a steering group to manage the agenda and to ensure that it is fit for purpose, and, more importantly, ground-breaking. It is my hope that politicians, those in the agricultural world, those who monitor our rivers and soils, academics and environmentalists will be present to begin a different kind of conversation - less about blaming and more about finding the points at which co-operation can happen. We are all in this together and the solutions will require co-ordination and courteous, intelligent and unguarded work. That the Church in Wales will host such an occasion and with the support of numerous organizations across Wales is the measure of respect in which we are held.

Governing Body will remember that I announced last year the decision of the Representative Body to release £100 million from its historic reserves to invest in evangelism. Alongside a substantial revision of the arrangements which allow the RB to support ministry in the dioceses, this initiative will be far reaching. Despite a turbulent and volatile market there are good reasons why now is the time to be developing our thinking and planning and some dioceses have already done this. Firstly, we now have each of the dioceses configured into Ministry or Mission Areas. We know there are things we can do together far more effectively than apart and allow greater energy to be at work in our church communities as a consequence.

Secondly, we have seen that there are communities which can grow. And the good news is that they are growing in urban and rural spaces, in evangelical and charismatic as well as catholic traditions, they are unilingual and bilingual and even multilingual.

What underpins the health and dynamism of such growth is a combination of excellent collaborative leadership, vibrant faith and creed and a clarity around purpose: who we are and what we’re trying to do and be. When surrounded by an outwardly focused ministry, there are few organizations who can compare with us and the growth we are seeing.

And I want to share just a little about one growing community:

St Thomas, Swansea

Credibility and authenticity is at the heart of our church life. We aim to do and to be exactly what it says on the tin. This has not always been the case. I’m grateful for significant developments we have seen in the church in the last three years. We have developed a robust safeguarding framework, matched with professional specialists to work with us and to shape policy for the Church In Wales. The triage system which brings HR, the legal dept, safeguarding and the Chief Executive together means we have a comprehensive and robust interconnection of accountability and risk assessment. An Independent Safeguarding Panel ensures we don’t fall into the trap of marking our own homework.

The Monmouth Review Implementation Group is nearing the end of its formal work and substantive changes have been made to address questions around recruitment, support, accountability, as well as addressing culture change in the church. One of the pieces of work which has found some traction, but needs more serious engagement, is the Dignity at Work Charter. We have more work to do around proper expectations and how we become better and safer as a church, and are looking to engage the Church more thoroughly with the Charter. I encourage every Ministry Area Council across the province to make annual engagement with the Dignity Charter part of their routine. There is more work to do still to make us a better church – financial training in Ministry Areas, and how to manage our buildings’ portfolio, will be matters to which we will need to return.

I want to draw GB’s attention to the excellent Periodic External Review report for St Padarn’s Institute. The report is a strong endorsement of the quality and direction of training undertaken by St Padarn’s. It is clear, however, that we need to do more as a Province and here the bishops have a particular responsibility. It is not possible to produce six different ways of training; not only is it inefficient but it will undermine the idea we are a single church with a unified understanding of ministry and training. We also need to develop the breadth of ministries the Church needs and how to blend these well within a generous understanding of what it means to be Anglican.

The unity of the Church at a provincial level has been given new energy of late. The Provincial Standing Committee has agreed to meet in a gathering which will be work, suffused with worship, to reflect together on the things we hold in common – values, objectives and yes, even resources. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Standing Committee have drawn attention to this gathering in their report but I anticipate it being strategically significant for the Church. We have also committed ourselves to meeting as a successor to the Joint Meetings, which have taken place in the last three years, towards the end of this year, but with an enhanced number to include all Archdeacons, Deans, Diocesan Secretaries, the National Team, RB Trustees, Standing Committee and Bench.

The value of this gathering (‘Convention’ or ‘Congress’) is to listen and learn. We ought to share good practice as a matter of course but to learn how to confer is less familiar to us. The art of the synod is to learn to walk together and this needs to become normative if we are to see our life as a Church in Wales flourish.

I started with some words from St John’s Gospel. In Chapter 21 there is the encounter between Mary and the risen Lord. She didn’t realise it was Jesus until he simply said, “Mary”. It is the Lord who knows each of us by name, who loves us unconditionally, who asks us to make the decision not to let our hearts be troubled and to respond to his call with faith and confidence.

Let us pray.

*Archbishop Andrew John*